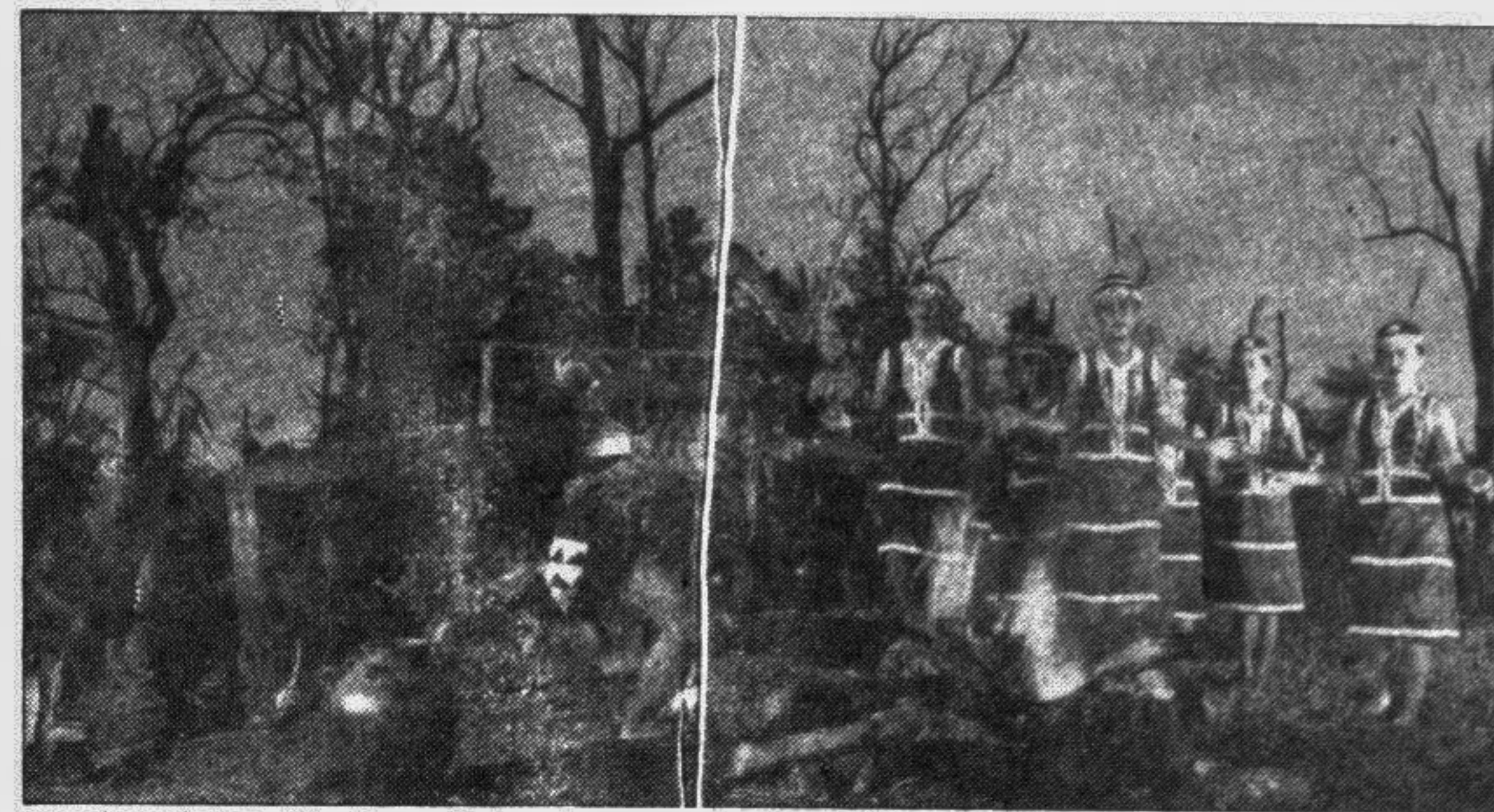




VIENNA, AUSTRIA
14-25 JUNE 1993

THE WORLD'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE



Magalang dance of the Ibans, Malaysia

Who are the Planet's Original Inhabitants?

HIGH on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights is the item on indigenous people. The human rights of indigenous people, especially their right to development as they choose, are increasingly the focus of international concern. The World Bank, whose policies and programmes directly affect many indigenous populations, has moved to make concerns regarding these populations central to its policy formulation and execution.

The World Conference is being held (Vienna, 14-25 June) in the middle of 1993, which is the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. These peoples represent a cultural diversity, a link with the past, and an attachment to the earth which are threatened by an increasingly homogeneous and urban global society. Yet development planners have tended not to take indigenous people adequately into account. Recently, however, indigenous people have made their voices better heard and development planners have responded more to their needs and to their contribution to society.

More than 300 million indigenous and tribal people live in over 70 countries in almost every climate zone from the remote Arctic regions and the deserts of northern and southern Africa to the Pacific islands and the rainforests of Asia and South America. There is a great diversity in language, culture, dress and habits among indigenous people. But they share common traits, such as a strong identity with their ancestral homelands.

In its 1987 report, *Our Common Future*, the World Commission on Environment and Development said indigenous communities "are the repositories of vast accumulations of traditional knowledge and experience that links humanity with its ancient origins. Their disappearance [would be] a loss for the larger society, which could learn a great deal from their traditional skills in sustainably managing very complex ecological systems. It is a terrible irony that as formal development reaches more deeply into rainforests, deserts, and other isolated environments, it tends to destroy the only cultures that have proved able to thrive in these environments."

For most indigenous people, land is not viewed as a commodity which can be bought or sold in impersonal markets, but rather as a substance endowed with sacred meanings which define their existence and identity. Similarly, the trees, plants, animals and fish which inhabit the land are not "natural resources", but highly personal beings which form part of their social

and spiritual universe. This close attachment to the land and a strong sense of ethnic identity are the defining characteristics of indigenous people.

On 10 December 1992, the United Nations General Assembly launched 1993 as the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. The impetus for designating a special year for indigenous people came from indigenous organizations, UN human rights and social development agencies and several Governments. The purpose was to highlight the importance of indigenous people to peace and security, human rights, economic development and the environment.

The theme of the international year is "Indigenous Peoples — A New Partnership". Among other things, the year's activities attempt to further international cooperation between states and intergovernmental bodies to solve problems faced by indigenous people, increase their participation in development projects that affect them, and raise public awareness about indigenous people. Activities during the international year focus on human rights, development and the environment, education and culture, health and self-government. The World Bank participated in the UN technical meeting to plan the international year and has its own activities to celebrate the year.

World Bank Policy

The World Bank was the first multilateral agency to issue a special policy for the treatment of indigenous people in internationally funded development projects. The original policy dates back to when the Bank became involved in several projects that affected the lands of indigenous tribes in the Brazilian Amazon. Safeguards embedded in the World Bank policy included recognizing, demarcating and protecting indigenous lands, and providing culturally appropriate social services, especially to protect and maintain indigenous people's health.

The policy says clearly: "The Bank will not assist development projects that knowingly involve encroachment on traditional territories being used or occupied by tribal people, unless adequate safeguards are provided."

Based on experience from the previous decade, the World Bank issued a revised policy in September 1991. The policy extended the definition of indigenous people to reflect the much broader range of social and legal definitions and situations in Bank member countries. The protective measures of the original policy were retained. But the revised version strengthened the policy

by stressing the need to promote the informed participation of indigenous people and their sharing in the social and economic benefits of development projects. One way of ensuring this is through the preparation and financing of special Indigenous Development Plans.

Assistance Projects

There are several projects in the Bank's lending programme that contain such plans or encourage participation by indigenous people. They include a rubber plantation project in India with a component that will help 3,000 tribal people improve their economic status by planting rubber in currently unproductive land. A rural development project in four of Mexico's poorest states contains a programme of 44 credit funds managed by indigenous people. The funds support initiatives such as training in preparing small-scale projects, accounting procedures, coffee-growing, artisan projects, establishing fishing cooperatives, and other cottage industries. The credit programme covers hundreds of indigenous communities.

Other projects include natural resources management programmes in Colombia, Egypt and Mali, and a rainforest conservation project in Brazil that will set apart land for tribal people. The Bank also has been carrying out other innovative work, such as a study of poverty among tribal people in Latin America and an assessment of the health and nutritional problems of tribes in India. Within the Bank, a number of training courses and special events have been held to increase the staff's sensitivity to the institution's policies and projects relating to indigenous people.

In January 1993, the President of the World Bank created a Vice Presidency on Environmentally Sustainable Development, and the Environment Department established a special Social Policy and Resettlement Division, to enable the institution to consolidate and improve its work on behalf of indigenous people and other social groups.

The International Year of the World's Indigenous People aims at creating a partnership among international agencies (such as the World Bank), governments and indigenous organizations to improve the conditions of some of the world's most vulnerable people. The Bank joined this partnership to further promote the welfare of indigenous people — and also to learn from these traditional keepers of the wisdom of sustainable development.

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"Still, there's some hint that there's at least been a little improvement," said Belcia Herrera, who helped coordinate the mission's human rights department for the first three months. "Although there's fear, people seem to be less afraid to talk to observers now, so we know more. Some people who haven't been able to return home in a year and a half are going back."

We feel with our publicity campaign and citing names of the guilty parties, maybe they will be more reticent to attack for fear of being tried later on."

Some pro-coup supporters object to the mission's presence on the pretext of nationalism. Others are hungry for any solution that will relieve Haiti's desperate economic situation.

There are others who just do not understand what the mission is about. Illiterate peasants in the countryside, isolated from news, are mistrustful of any foreigner. Living under the gun of the local sheriff, they prefer to suffer in silence rather than risk reprisal for seeking retribution.

"Despite the numerous problems," said Anno Fuller of the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, "I'm encouraged that the mission is acting in the right way. They are confronting the military with specific cases, publicising abuses, naming the guilty party, intervening in arrest."

Unfortunately, since the mission started, human rights violations have not decreased, and in the most recent period they have actually risen. Because of this and fear that if Aristide does return, retaliation against the rank and file soldiers could take place, there is a proposal to deploy a UN police force of up to 1,000 to aid Haiti during negotiations.

Many political leaders and grassroots organisers have criticised the plan, interpreting it as military intervention — GEMINI NEWS

KATHIE KLARREICH is a US journalist living in Port au Prince.

UN Heralds Human Rights in Haiti

Nearly two years after the coup in Haiti that overthrew its first popularly elected president Jean Bertrand Aristide, the international community is taking notice of that country. More than 100 civilian observers from the United Nations and the Organisation of American States are in the beleaguered Caribbean country to monitor human rights violations. Meantime, the army — the real power behind the current regime — has been targeting supporters of the deposed president

Kathie Klarreich writes from Port-au-Prince

NOT so long ago Haiti was as desirable a vacation spot as any other Caribbean island. But an Aids care in the early 1980s and political instability kept foreigners away. Non-governmental agencies folded up and embassies functioned with a skeletal staff.

Today, there is a new international presence — 127 civilian observers from the United Nations and the Organisation of American States are fanning out across Haiti's nine geographic departments. But the end of the summer there will be about 280 observers.

Civilian mission came at the request of the legitimately elected government of President Jean Bertrand Aristide, who has been living in exile since the September 30, 1991 coup d'état. It is the first time the UN and the OAS have deployed a joint mission. It is also the first time a human rights monitoring team has been sent to a country before a political settlement has been reached.

The mission's Terms of Reference were agreed on February 9 by the de Facto government. Its mandate says they can circulate freely anywhere in the country while calling for respect for human rights according to the 1987 Haitian constitution. Yet lawlessness prevails, making it hard for the mission just to pursue its objectives, let alone achieve them.

Father Antoine Adrien heads the Presidential Commission, a group of people chosen by Aristide to represent him while he is in exile. Adrien says: "The goal of the coup was to make it impossible to have any real change in society — especially to permit

the emergence of grassroots groups.

"The target of repression is the youth and community organisers. The core of the problem is the army, because they decide what the law is that day, depending on their mood. As long as there is no solution with the army, there is no solution."

The mission is supposed to operate independently from the negotiating team, spearheaded by UN special envoy Dante Caputo. But he negotiates the roller-coaster ride has had a direct link to human rights violations.

Mission director Colin Granderson of Trinidad says: "If we could finalise a negotiated settlement, I believe there would be a dramatic decrease in the number of human rights violations. We have reason to believe there is a correlation between the repression and the political crisis. The majority of people targeted are alleged Aristide supporters. If there is no political solution, we will be in an extremely difficult position."

Among the issues being discussed in the settlement is the resignation of the Haitian military's high command in return for political amnesty for the coup leaders, a new prime minister who will be acceptable to Aristide as well as the legislative branch, and the eventual return of Aristide.

Violence followed Caputo's April 16 departure from Haiti after he failed to get the army to sign an agreement.

Joe Sillis, spokesman for UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali, said they were "profoundly worried about the number and severity of violations of human rights, consisting of arbitrary detentions, sys-



tematic repression and torture perpetrated and inflicted by members of the armed forces and persons aligned with them. The attacks are to restrain, prohibit and forbid freedom of expression, the right to meet peacefully and to demonstrate."

The mission has, with some difficulty, been allowed access to most of the prisons, which operate under the oppressive hands of the military. In the

National Penitentiary, the mission was able to take an unprecedented inventory of the prisoners, and secured the release of 106 people being detained illegally.

In one town on Haiti's southern coast, however, the rural sheriff preferred to release all the prisoners rather than allow the mission access to them. In the western town of Ti Goave, the mission found people starving to death as a

result of the military separating them from the prisoners whose families supplied food.

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How many indigenous peoples are there, and where do they live?

The world's estimated 300 million indigenous people are spread across the world in more than 70 countries. Among them are the Indians of the Americas, the Inuit and Aleutians of the circumpolar region, the Saami of northern Europe, the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia and the Maori of New Zealand. More than 60 per cent of Bolivia's population is indigenous, and indigenous peoples make up roughly half the populations of Guatemala and Peru. China and India together have more than 100 million indigenous and tribal people. About 10 million indigenous people live in Myanmar.

What are the living conditions of tribal peoples?

Despite their diversity, they face similar problems. Under the march of colonialism, the spread of non-indigenous religions and the relentless pace of development and modernization, indigenous groups have seen their traditional cultures eroded and their landholdings confiscated or signed away as part of the economic coercion to which they were subjected. This legacy has helped to make indigenous peoples some of the most disadvantaged groups on Earth.

Most of India's tribal people live below the poverty line.

The life expectancy of indigenous people in northern Russia is 18 years less than the national average.

Unemployment among Australia's Aborigines is five times the national average.

More generally, indigenous people who are integrated into a national society face discrimination and exploitation in housing, education and in matters having to do with language and religion. Those remaining in their traditional territories face disruption of their cultures and forced displacement as their lands and natural resources are claimed

for national development. It is no exaggeration to say that some indigenous people live under the threat of extinction.

What is the status of ethnic groups?

The growing awareness about human rights in the post-war era of the past 40 years or so has not been matched by parallel progress in enhancing the rights of indigenous groups.

However, a new activism by Indian, tribal and aboriginal groups in the last decade or so has produced signs that a different attitude is developing.

In 1979, the Parliament of Denmark granted self-government to Greenland and jurisdiction over education, health care, social welfare and economic development.

Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia and Mexico have adopted far-reaching laws on the rights of indigenous people.

The Government of New Zealand and the National Maori Congress are engaged in a constructive dialogue that aims to resolve a number of disputes, including the issue of self-rule.

In Canada, one million indigenous people, among them Mohawk, Cree and Inuit, have increased their visibility, attained a level of political power previously unimagined and used their newfound position to protect their lands and carve out new social and economic gains.

Still, despite these successes and their growing political and organizational competence, indigenous peoples continue to lose their lands, resources and identities.

What are the concerns of ethnic minorities?

Among the issues that concern indigenous peoples are:

- land and resources
- human rights
- internal colonization
- self-government
- self-development
- environment
- discrimination
- health
- education
- language
- cultural survival
- intellectual property rights
- social and economic conditions

Indigenous peoples see themselves as the legitimate claimants to their territories and natural resources, and consider control over local economy, social planning, land use and taxation essential to their existence. Thus they are seeking greater degrees of autonomy and self-rule.

The lives of the 50 million indigenous people who inhabit the world's tropical rainforests are threatened by deforestation. But while indigenous people are on the front lines of environmental degradation, they also have a vital role to play in environmental protection. For centuries, they have engaged in sustainable land management and land use in the areas in which they live.

The annual market value of drugs derived from medicinal plants discovered, developed and passed from generation to generation by indigenous peoples exceeds \$43 billion. Drug companies tap into this indigenous knowledge but rarely share the profits with indigenous peoples. Thus indigenous peoples are attempting to gain greater protection for their intellectual property.

The high quality of indigenous artwork and cultural artifacts generates great demand for them, but theft and the unauthorized sale of indigenous items robs the creators of both money and their cultural patrimony. Thus indigenous peoples are looking to secure the right to their cultural property.

Indigenous peoples want to maintain their distinct cultures and transmit their cultural heritage to subsequent generations. Thus they are demanding the right to educate their children in their own languages, with their own textbooks and school material.

What are these peoples doing to achieve their goals?

Indigenous peoples have been demanding justice from the international community for many years. They have organized locally, nationally and regionally and are active in the international diplomatic arena, seeking respect for their cultures and ways of life and full participation in the decisions that affect them.

Twelve indigenous peoples' organizations have consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). These are: Four Directions Council, Grand Council of the Crees (Quebec), Indian Council of South America, Indian Law Resource Centre, Indigenous World Association, International Indian Treaty Council, International Organization of Indigenous Resources Development, Inuit Circumpolar Conference, National Aboriginal and Islander Legal Services Secretariat, National Indian Youth Council, Nordic Saami Council and World Council of Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous communities have also resorted to the legal system, in some cases winning recognition of their claims. The Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Indians of Maine were recently awarded \$80 million over a violation of the Non-Intercourse Act, which was passed in 1870 and provided that no one could buy or take land from Indians without official United States approval. The tribes used part of the award to purchase 300,000 acres of timberland.

What is the United Nations doing for indigenous peoples?

The United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations is the centre of indigenous rights activities within the United Nations system. The Working Group:

- reviews Government policies covering the protection of the human rights of indigenous peoples;

- makes recommendations to the United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities and to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, which promote action on issues related to indigenous peoples; and

- is drafting, as part of its mandate to develop international standards concerning the rights of indigenous peoples, a Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, which is expected to be completed in 1993.

Increasingly, indigenous organizations make use of the United Nations complaints procedures for human rights violations. For example, the "1503" procedure established by ECOSOC enables indigenous organizations to voice their concerns before the United Nations and to appeal for redress.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was the first international body to take steps to promote the rights of indigenous groups. ILO Convention No 169 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples affirms that no State or social group has the right to deny the identity to which an indigenous people may lay claim, and places responsibility on States for ensuring